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WAR CABINET.

FOREIGN-LANGUAGE PERIODICALS.

NOTE BY THE MINISTER OF INFORMATION.

SOME doubts were expressed at the meeting of the War Cabinet on the 4th February last (W.M. (44) 15th Conclusions) about the position of the various foreign-language periodicals published in this country and about His Majesty's Government's relation to them. In particular, the question was raised why this or that publication is not suppressed if it persistently attacks another ally or otherwise imperils Allied unity. Accordingly, the following brief notes are circulated in an attempt to summarise the position.

B. B.

Ministry of Information,
11th February, 1944.

1. The only general power of suppressing publications in this country is that given to the Home Secretary by Defence Regulations 2 (c) and 2 (d). The basis of this right of suppression is that a publication is "fomenting opposition to the prosecution to a successful issue of any war in which His Majesty is engaged." The sins of these periodicals, however, hardly come within this category.

2. Nearly all these foreign-language periodicals have come into existence since the outbreak of war to meet the needs of the foreign refugee communities. But it is only since the 16th August, 1940, that a licence to publish has been necessary. Such licences are obtained from the Ministry of Supply on the recommendation of another Government Department (in the great majority of cases the Ministry of Information) and can be revoked on notice. It follows that if a periodical which was first published after the 16th August, 1940, ceases to justify its existence, as by continually fomenting Allied discord, it can be suppressed by revocation of its licence. This power has been resorted to on occasions when a periodical has become unsatisfactory. But unfortunately some of the troublesome productions date from before the 16th August, 1940. Their right to publish is the same as that of any other organ of the free Press in this country.

3. The right to publish is quite distinct from the right to get paper to use in publishing. In general, the amount of paper that periodicals may consume is limited by general regulations of the Ministry of Supply. But the special circumstances attending these war-time foreign-language periodicals, with no pre-war datum line, have led to a system under which their paper consumption is regulated by *ad hoc* directions of the Ministry of Information, and the paper stocks required are debited to the Ministry of Information and remain its property. If a periodical under this régime pursues an unsatisfactory editorial policy it is within our power to deprive it of all connexion with His Majesty's Government by declining to approve of its further publication and withdrawing our paper stocks. At least then it does not receive our support. Moreover, if it was first published after the 16th August, 1940, it necessarily disappears. But if such a periodical can continue to publish without licence (as it can if it was first published before the 16th August, 1940), the withdrawal of His Majesty's Government's support does not necessarily involve its disappearance. Paper may lawfully be obtained in the market and production continue without the Government's being able to prevent it. The only difference would be that such production would normally be of a reduced number of copies, since the general limiting provision applying to all periodicals' paper consumption would give a lower output than that permitted by special Ministry of Information concession.